

SPECIAL EVENTS

*The Faculty of Music,
University of Toronto*

*Concert Hall,
Edward Johnson Building*

BORODIN QUARTET

*Rostislav Dubinsky - Violin
Yaroslav Alexandrov - Violin*

*Dimitri Shebalin - Viola
Valentin Berlinsky - Cello*

Thursday, January 5, 1967

8:30 p.m.

Programme

THIRD QUARTET, OP. 22 - - - - - Hindemith

Fugato. Sehr langsame Viertel
Schnelle Achtel. Sehr energisch
Ruhige Viertel. Stets fließend
Mässig schnelle Viertel
Rondo. Gemächlich und mit Grazie

Paul Hindemith's interest in quartet-writing was lasting and practical. His six published quartets span a period from 1918 to 1945. The Third Quartet, the only one that is played at all frequently in concerts, dates from 1922, a prolific year for Hindemith the composer but also a time when he was touring as violist with a professional ensemble called the Amar Quartet. His music of the time was full of aggressive rhythms and boldly dissonant textures. In the series of works called *Kleine Kammermusik* and in his *Suite* 1922 for piano he even essayed the jazz idiom. The Third Quartet reflects his musical preoccupations of that period in its free-ranging chromatic style, its asymmetrical metres (no metre signatures are used; instead there are just indications of which note-value constitutes the "beat" in each movement).

The first movement is a slow "fugato" on a theme marked "very soft and intimate". The second, by contrast, is in the strongly-accented early 20th-century style often called "motoristic". Hindemith's quantitative, rather than metrical, groupings and phrasings result in a constant and cumulative feeling of jabbing attacks. Hindemith's music was termed in later years "lean and athletic"; here it is athletic and well-fed. Again a sharp contrast is supplied in the third movement. It is curious to find the composer in the middle of his most aggressive "motoristic" period producing suddenly a piece of sheer artless lyricism — seemingly artless, at any rate. The entire movement is played with mutes, and the main idea is a haunting tune as often as not played in the lowest register of (democratic touch) the second violin, while the lower strings strum a guitar-like background in a different key. The last two movements are joined together. A cello cadenza, to which the viola later contributes, marks an emphatic and swift transition to the rondo-finale.

FIVE MOVEMENTS FOR STRING QUARTET, OP. 5 - - - - - Webern

Heftig bewegt
Sehr langsam
Sehr bewegt
Sehr langsam
In zarter Bewegung

The quartet attracted Webern more than any other standard medium. A student quartet has been lost; two other works — the *Bagatelles*, Opus 9, and the *Quartet*, Opus 28 — postdate this one. The *Movements* were written in 1909 and are as expressionistic and atonal as most of Schoenberg's and Berg's music of that period. Webern's sudden, hyper-tense contrasts of semi-incoherent sound-bursts are equivalent to the "spontaneous" color-bursts of Kandinsky. (Webern, like Schoenberg, was associated with Kokoschka, Kandinsky, and other painters in the expressionist or *Blaue Reiter* school around

this time.) "Atonal" was a bad word—at least with Berg; but, one suspects, with Webern too. Still, the overt technical intention in most of these pre-World-War-One works is avoidance of not just key-centres, but also any groups of notes which might suggest major or minor triads. Expressionism explains the compression and intensity of these pieces from the emotional standpoint, while atonality gives a technical reason for their brevity. Just as their moods had to be short and violent so their sounds had to eschew conventional repetitions, the time-worn processes of key-insistence.

Schoenberg was much influenced by these Webern microcosms, as one can see in his *Pierrot Lunaire* and Opus 19 piano pieces of a few years later. As he once wrote of Webern: "Every glance can be extended to a poem, every sigh to a novel. But to express a novel by a single gesture, a happiness in a single breath — such concentration is to be found only where there is a corresponding basic stability."

The whole cycle takes under ten minutes to perform. The most substantial pieces are the first and fifth. The first, in the course of its two-and-a-half quick and dizzy minutes, encompasses a wild variety of expressions (the word "Ausdruck" — "expression" — occurs several times in the score), and in doing so draws into play almost every device of string performance: notes are plucked, attacked with the wood as well as hair of the bow, played as harmonics, on the bridge, on the fingerboard, muted, unmuted; moreover, 27 different tempo-changes are noted for the 55 bars of this single movement, and the dynamic indications are far more profuse than that. If the second and fourth movements are melodic dream-images, the third is an expressionistic version of the traditional will-o-the-wisp scherzo. The fifth, a more extended dream-piece, centres around two recurrent sounds — a low-cello pattern of thirds and a series of plucked chords.

— I N T E R M I S S I O N —

QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 59, No. 1 - - - - - Beethoven

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto

Thème russe: Allegro

This, the first "Rasumovsky" quartet, recalls such serene works of Beethoven as the Violin Concerto, the Sixth Symphony, and the Piano Concerto in G. The serenity, the classic beauty, and also the occasional pastoral suggestion may be accounted for by the extreme simplicity and purity of diatonic harmonies here.

The work opens with a "dangerously broad and symmetrical melody" (Tovey). "Nothing can be more quiet than the way in which such a melody will disengage itself from symmetry and broaden into something evidently part of a larger whole; and the process is as dramatic as it is quiet." One is always struck with the breadth and incomparable melodic quality of this opening — but also with how hard it is after hearing it to whistle past the first eight bars. It is indeed "part of a larger whole": the "larger whole" is its

realization, its continuous unfolding in the course of this wonderful movement. Astonishing it is, also, that Beethoven's auditive imagination remained so very sensitive despite his tragic loss of hearing: for instance, it is the sheer sound of the floating tonic and dominant chords in the coda that so transports us.

The first movement is notable for several special features besides these general ones. An unmistakeable touch of strangeness is provided by the curious dialogue in sustained chords, evidently unrelated harmonically, which occurs three times. Possibly for the first time in a quartet, there is no formal close to the exposition. The development is on a broad scale almost equal to that in the Third Symphony, and embraces linear treatments of the main theme, animated figural sections, a double fugato, and finally a suspenseful climbing passage in the first violin which by a master stroke leads to the reprise, not of the main theme, but of one of its subordinates; the main theme follows.

The second movement is a totally unprecedented and fantastic kind of scherzo. The customary closed form of scherzo-and-trio is abandoned, and instead a very free sonata form evolves, with a wild succession of harmonies that even today is hair-raising enough to silence those who would call classical tonality a "restriction". A famous anecdote has it that the cellist at the first performance tore his part to bits and stamped on it when he saw what he had to play at the start. The opening is indeed not a theme at all: it is a rhythm, pounded out on one note, with a fragment of melody in answer to it. The rhythm dominates almost every part of the piece, with the exception of a recurring short passage marked *dolce*; the answering fragment is varied, expanded, harmonized and contrapuntalized within an inch of its existence.

The Adagio, in the minor, is essentially an emotional mood-piece of deep elegiac sorrow and pathos, decidedly written in the first person. The melody has its expressive downward sixth; semitone decorations give a sorrowing effect; pulsing anticipation-notes suggest a sighing quality. Less easily explained, here as in the first movement, are the miracles of texture — especially as the work of a deaf man. A cadenza for the first violin leads directly to the finale.

According to Czerny, "Beethoven pledged himself to weave a Russian melody into every quartet" of the Opus 59 series, in honor of Rasumovsky. In this work and the E minor Quartet (No. 2), the composer labels the borrowed material "Thème russe". A present-day musicologist tells us these themes were taken from "a collection of 150 Russian songs published in 1790 by Ivan Pratch". The Russian flavor of the theme in this case is instinct in its contours and in the harmonization Beethoven gives it in slow tempo just before the end. But again it is hard, after hearing, to whistle past its first few measures, without the aid of Mr. Pratch's forgotten volume. On the other hand, if one loses its melody, one is at least left vibrating with the vivid memory of its motives, so thoroughly do they pervade the piece.

Notes by John Beckwith

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
Faculty of Music

BORODIN STRING QUARTET

REVISED PROGRAMME

Quartet No.2 in D major
Allegro moderato
Scherzo
Notturmo (andante)
Finale (andante-vivace)

Borodin

Quartet No.4 in D major, Opus 83
Allegretto
Andantino
Allegretto - Allegretto

Shostakovich

INTERMISSION

5 Pieces for Quartet, Opus 5
(see original programme)

Webern

Quartet Opus 95 in F minor
Allegro con brio
Allegretto ma non troppo
Allegro assai vivace ma serio
Larghetto - Allegretto agitato

Beethoven

Among the Beethoven quartets, this work stands as one of the shortest, subtlest, and most compressed. It has also been characterized, justly, as a "transitional" composition, one which Janus-facedly shows traits of both "middle" and "late" periods in Beethoven's writing. There are, of course, dangers in adopting the "three periods, three styles" theory of nineteenth-century Beethoven-commentators. It represents an oversimplification, there being several more successive styles, genres, and strains than that, in Beethoven's output. But if this theory is adopted, with caution, the F minor Quartet certainly shows the transition with clarity. For example, its tone is brusque and confident ("middle"-period traits), but its language is often highly contrapuntal (a "late" one).

The work was composed for personal reasons, independently of any publication series or commission. It bears a dedication to the Freiherr Nikolaus Zmeskall von

Domanowecz, a Viennese civil servant and amateur violinist and a devoted friend of the composer. Beethoven's capacity for friendship was vast, but with his bumptious nature it was inevitable that Zmeskall, like the various other steadfast cronies of the Beethoven circle, was made the butt of a lot of rather crude kidding from time to time: he is addressed in Beethoven's letters variously as, for instance, "Baron Mucksplasher" and "Wearer of the Grand Cross of Violoncellity". The letter in which Beethoven sent the Quartet to his friend, however, speaks only of gratitude for long loyalty.

Beethoven once called the Quartet a "quartetto serio". Mendelssohn, a great admirer of it felt it represented Beethoven in his most typical manner. (The statement reveals also quite a lot about Mendelssohn, because, as D.F. Tovey notes, this is just the sort of chamber-music work Mendelssohn himself would like to have written and could not). The most typical aspects of the piece - for indeed there is no question at all who wrote it - are the cryptic, energy-filled motives which form the building-tiles of its structures. Two superb examples are the opening motives of the first and third movements. The remark is often made of Beethoven's ideas that they are commonplace in themselves, but become ennobled through his treatment of them. This is a questionable generalization, especially to anyone who has traced the careful polishing of these very ideas evidenced in the composer's sketch-books. With both motives mentioned here, the rhythmic incisiveness is extremely fine-drawn and judicious. The first-movement motive is also notable for its unusual scalic contour, and that of the third for its harmonic coloring, as of an isolated frame from the middle of some dramatic movie-chase. Beethoven towers over his fellows not just by superior craft but also (as with Bach, or Stravinsky) by superior ideas, superior inspiration.

The terseness of the work is shown at the outset in an allegro whose continuity is headlong and superbly proportioned despite the fact that analysis shows an unusually short development section and a severe curtailing of the main theme in its restatement. It is not in Beethoven's nature to use a conventional or expected number of bars or phrases if fewer will do.

A complex key-contrast is suggested in the choice of D major for the second movement- the sort of contrast Haydn used occasionally. This Allegretto has a main theme of simple and even docile flavor, contrasting with some quasi-"late"period polyphony. Again the proportions of the two ideas, as they alternate, have a curiously convincing asymmetry. Typifying the stillness of the movement is the way Beethoven uses the tonic chord itself as a quiet suspense-builder for the restatement. The stillness is rudely broken by the scherzo movement which is marked to follow without a break. D. major is again a prominent key of contrast here, being used for one of the appearances of the expressive trio-section. Underlying the seriousness of this movement are the central diminished-seventh harmonies (Beethoven's tools of pathos) and the grimly galloping main rhythms.

The finale is unique in form and somewhat Schubertian in flavor. A brief larghetto serves as an introduction, gradually easing into the rhythm of the main portions of the movement. These make out a kind of skeleton rondo, with textural changes at each appearance of its expressive, breathless theme. The last one-third or so of the piece is taken up with a long peroration, starting in this main tempo but accelerating to a faster conclusion expressed in vibrant, confident (major-key), and again notably contrapuntal terms.